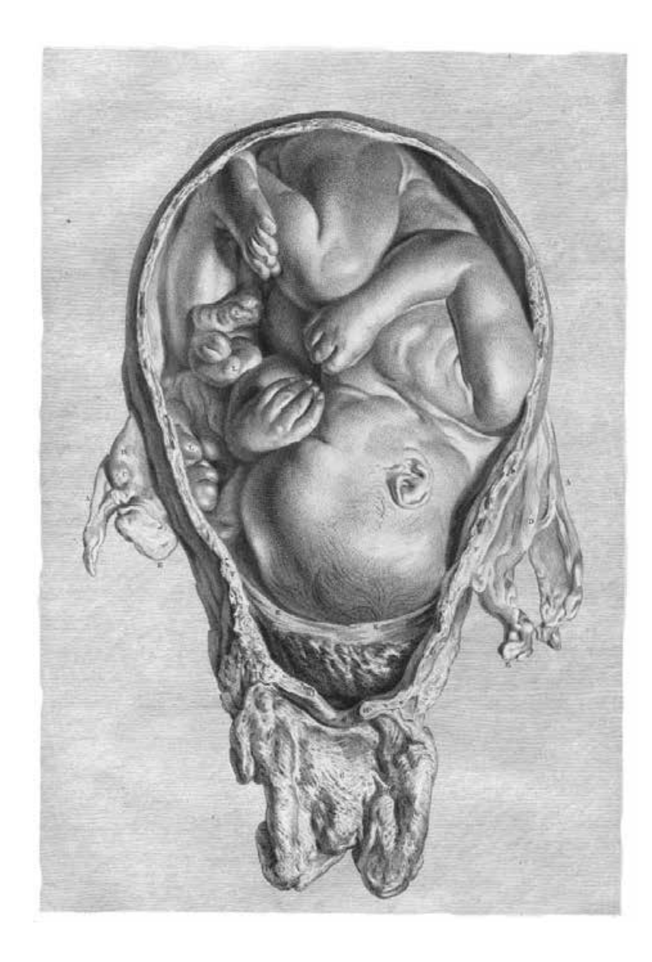
ORIGIN early 17th cent.: from Latin **emasculat-**, from the verb **emasculare**, from **e-** (variant of **ex-**, expressing a change of state) + **masculus 'male'**.



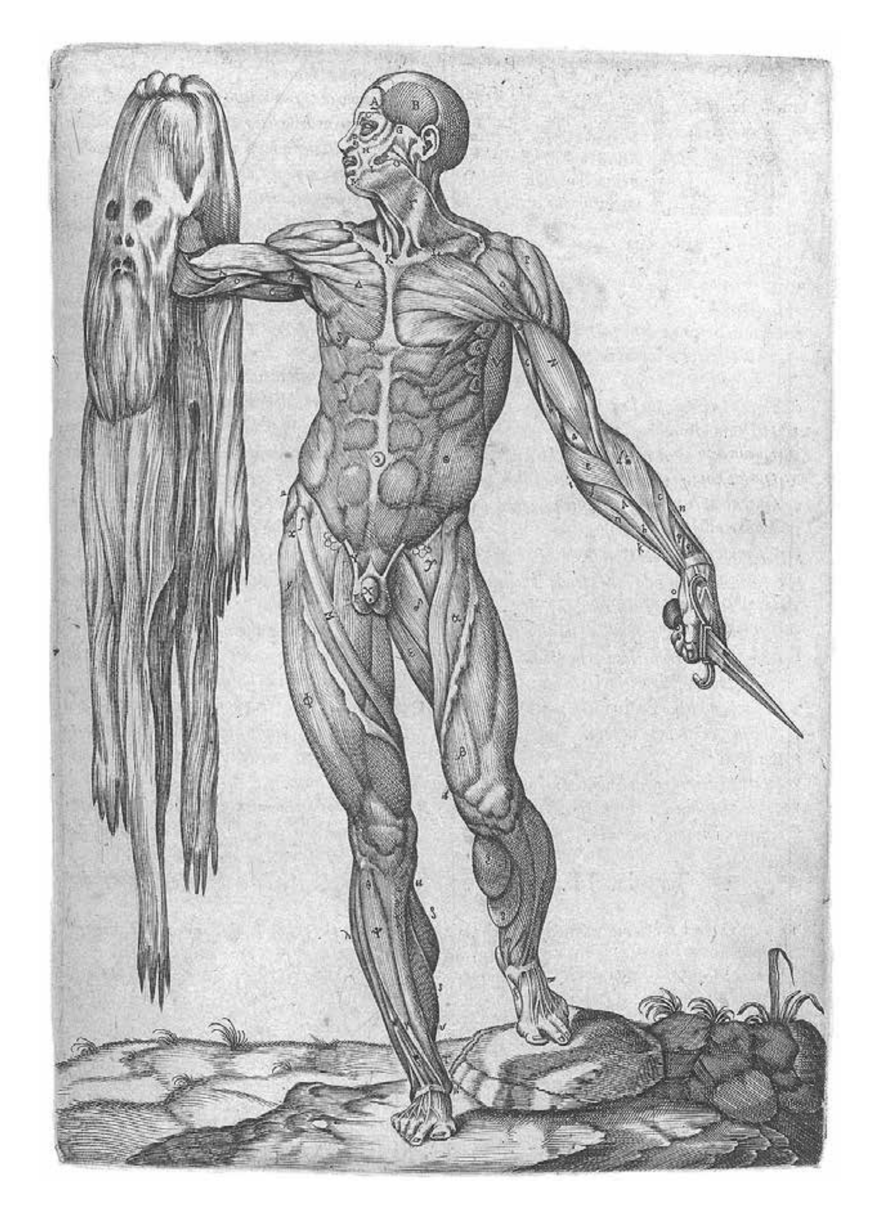
What is "men's work"?

What can we accomplish?

How do we stay accountable?

Where do we go from here?

Ex Masculus.



Critical Reflections on Pro-Feminist Men's Groups



Readable and printable files of this zine are available online at

exmasculus.wordpress.com

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Be patient – listen, avoid interrupting, and give everyone a chance to speak.

Suspend judgment – give people the benefit of the doubt, as there isn't one right way.

Be kind – allow people to be honest without fearing condemnation, to assist everyone's growth and support new or challenging ideas or emotions.

Avoid resentment – confront words or conduct directly (if not immediately) when they bother you, instead of saying nothing and developing resentment.

Forgive, to the extent you're able – people can change, like we all have.

Avoid blame – we all make mistakes, so they shouldn't be seen as personal failures.

Be thankful – give thanks for people around the world building movements for social justice.

Avoid praise – while we recognize and thank people for their efforts, praise can obscure the need for resilient communities as opposed to individuals acting alone.

Avoid comparing people – none of us are beginners, we all grew up with prejudices, and none of us are perfect; so this isn't a competition to see who has the best analysis.

Maintain confidentiality – when talking with people who aren't in the group, avoid discussing who said what or otherwise linking people with information they shared during a group meeting (or social gathering).

Live simply – the focus is strong relationships, not fame, money, or expansion; thus, the group may remain small on purpose to cultivate affinity.

Build a movement – it isn't just what we're doing, but how we're doing it, that matters.

Collaborate – we will struggle together to accomplish our shared goals.

See the connections – we can't undermine one form of oppression without understanding that all forms of oppression are connected.

Accept guidance – when both parties are amenable, advice or mentoring allows us to grow.

Emphasize accountability – we seek to remain accountable to one another and to the people with whom our group intends to collaborate.

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Introduction.

We come from different experiences, vastly different horizons, perspectives, environments, genes and chasms of differing socializations. Yet there is a we, a dangerously pervasive generalization of we that needs a change. Lives are at stake and lives are being extinguished; being taken away, being forced under the avalanches of trauma, shame and powerlessness.

Because of unquestioned social patterns of knowing, our bodies (and our inextricable minds) become uneven minefields for others' expectations and judgments, for others' violence and their own internalized powerlessness. Women and trans* people's bodies face disproportionate and incredibly uneven risks from state sanctioned and extra-legal violence. It isn't new and it has never been tolerable. Yet it's generally accepted on micro and macro-social levels. Objectification of bodies has become commonplace and the sting we feel from prying eyes and expectant glares, from groping hands and loaded remarks attacks insidiously, consistently and confidently.

And we are losing our friends and mothers and sisters and sons.

The desperation has been muffled under the air of complacency with sexual harassment, assault, and the objectification sanctified by the state and church, by the family and community who reinforce these expectations and patterns by, not recognizing, not addressing and not attacking the reality of abuse in our daily lives.

Men (or those who experience male privilege) need to be held accountable. Men need to hold one another accountable and take responsibility in owning our privileges and socializations. By recognizing the power discrepancies inherent in our social interactions, men can begin to critically engage with our identities while actively listening to women and trans* folk. These voices are not given equal footing, because of the reality of the past we live under and the heavy, incomparable weight of the present and all its inadequacies and brutalities. We need to dream a world into being by acting in the present in the conditions we all live and operate under.

Men need to critically engage with what it means to be "a man" and the present notions of masculinity, to engage with our

Recommendations for People Trying to Start Radical Men's Groups

by Tim Phillips

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Six of us started a radical men's group in the Bay Area in the summer of 2011. We met regularly for six months. For people interested in starting similar groups, one idea is to begin with group agreements. The following are 21 examples, which are borrowed from or inspired by Dismantling Racism Works, the philosopher Epictetus, and the Aorta Collective.

Commit – participate, ask questions, think critically, and support others.

Avoid delay – there are infinite reasons to postpone discussions about patriarchy, masculinity, and sexism, but we grow from these discussions even when the circumstances aren't perfect.

Clarify the decision-making process – the decision-making process should be clear and, to the best of our ability, include the people most affected by our decisions.

Respect people's time – focus on the question at issue, the limited time available, and offering specific suggestions when providing critical feedback.

Avoid whining – difficult situations are often the best opportunities for growth.

difficult to think about their friend in this way; perhaps forgetting that I was as shocked as they were, to finally comprehend that the person I cared and trusted most in the world was so unwilling to have consensual sex, to apologise for the series of times he had ignored my pleas for a consensual sex life and times I cried "no", or to be apologetic or accountable about his behaviours of rape. I am not a victim, but yes, I am pissed off.

I felt and still feel the pain of learning that men appear to rally around each other, to defend, excuse, hide or protect the shitty actions of their friends ---> meanwhile issuing more blame and suspicion onto women, leaving it up to women to deflect attacks of their boundaries once again.

What might be considered 'success'?

When honest and respectful dialogue can occur between people that don't need to be cordoned off or protected from each other. When conversations are no longer segregated and sectarian. When spaces actually finally feel safe for everyone in them, male*, female* and trans* folk.

Resources:

Said The Pot To The Kettle http://www.tangledwilderness.org/pdfs/saidthepottothekettle-letter.pdf is a nice start, but don't just stick to literature made especially "for anarchist men". If interested in feminism, privilege, labour rights, immigration and border conditions, indigenous struggles, post-colonialism, whatever - go to the source of data and look/listen/read with an open mind.

sons, brothers, fathers and friends. Men need to be brave while redefining bravery, to engage with the challenges that put the status quo back on the table as suspect. We need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. We need to engage across difference, actively listening to women and trans* folk and their experiences, their anger and frustration and needs, while engaging with and confronting other men who are reproducing heteropatriarchal or misogynist ways of being.

We desperately need a change. All of us. Right now, though the stakes are vastly different and experiences often contrasting. If you are a man, male socialized, or benefit from unearned male privilege, we desperately need you to engage critically with your socialization and with other men, sharing experiences and listening to women, trans* and queer folk about how differing intersecting identities experience and fight against the weight of this feverish and lethal reality.

We present this zine in the hope of mobilizing this motivation, of reminding ourselves that there is no excuse to wait, to put aside this critical facet of struggle in order to engage on "more pertinent" causes. We all have a responsibility (especially as men) to hold one another accountable in our processes of deconditioning and our struggles for collective liberation. All the time. And it is scary and hard and we need to be simultaneously healing, building relationships of support and care, and growing and fighting together.

This zine is a compilation of voices speaking to the idea of "pro-feminist men's work", what it is, why we need it and how to do it. The writing in this zine comes from a myriad of persons including queer, trans*, women and men. We hope that it will act as a springboard; a place for ideas, perspectives, critical thoughts, successes and failures, and ultimately as a resource for engaging on various fronts to deconstruct and challenge patriarchy in the world and in our lives. We as editors also hope that this is the first in a series of gathered writings on the intricacies and varying voices on the "how to's" of smashing patriarchy. We imagine this as an addition to the potential unlimited amount of writing that delves into the fronts and strategies we engage in and work with to end the reign of heteropatriachy, and sexual and gendered violence.

we need a change

What is

Trigger warning!

The following piece contains descriptions of physical and sexual violence. Please make sure you are feeling emotionally prepared before you continue.

The Oakland Men's Project

Adapted from *Men's Work: How to Stop the Violence That Tears Our Lives Apart*

by Paul Kivel

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We began the work of the Oakland Men's Project in 1979 with a multitude of personal motivations, not the least of which was that the male roles we had been trained to follow didn't work. Even without identifying it as a box, we knew we wanted out.

The women's movement and a 1978 national conference in San Francisco on violence against women were our immediate inspirations. For years, women's groups had been responding to the needs of women survivors of male violence by operating shelters and rape crisis centers. One result of this organizing was to make the public aware of the tremendous need for shelter, counseling, advocacy, and legal intervention. During this period the devastating effects of the violence on women, children, and even on men became more and more visible.

Some men began to see that we could no longer discount sexual harassment, battery, and rape as women's problems. These were clearly part of a nationwide social problem. We could see that the effects of past violence and the threat of future violence was keeping women off the shop floor, out of the corporate office, and out of public office. It was keeping them in dangerous marriages and in poverty.

QUESTIONS FOR ME?

How have men's groups affected me personally?

Making zines about community accountability and being a survivor, I have been asked if my writing can be used for Men's Pro-Feminist Reading Groups, one being in the city/community where my (most recent) perpetrator lives. I was happy for them to use it, but was scared to express or share my apprehension about being critiqued, judged, and/or not believed. Aware of the individual opinions of people in that community and space, I was not hopeful that people (i.e. cis-men) would respond well to my zines about the process of trying to discuss continual sexual abuse/disregard of my vocal protests and boundaries throughout a two-year relationship, and my angry tirade that followed the realisation of how unaccountable my partner chose to remain in the months that followed the final act of rape. I didn't hear any feedback from it, although I would have been very interested in (and scared of) what came out of that reading group. I feel a similar unease with anti-racism groups that exclude People of Colour (in the UK and Germany).

My bias contains my wariness around cis-men, my perspective shaped by the responses I've received since starting to write, and how hard some will fight to justify the actions of perpetrators, and how much some resist listening to, or believing accounts of survivors. I've had anarchist men email me implying that I was lying, telling me in person that it was a mistake for me to write those zines, and making judgements and accusations based on the little they knew instead of asking me to clarify anything or give them more information. I've had people from the London DIY punk community saying that it was too unbelievable and

PERFORMATIVE ACTIVISM
Strike a pose... How much is demonstrated for a real or imagined audience? How much merely matches our black hoodie and boots? How much is borne out of expectation from peers, or a hope for acceptance? How much is coming from a real desire or urgent appeal for justice, etc?

DISPLACED ANGER
What is reactionary? What is projected? What is from badly thought out anti-authoritarianism? What is informed constructive action and mostly likely to achieve the change you want to see happen?

SAFE SPACES
What do our internal processes look like? How do we talk to one another? Do those with volume and experience get instilled with authority and control? Are we silencing or invisibilising any group or individual? Is there hierarchy or oppression or machismo within these walls?

COLONISATION, PATRONISATION, PATERNALISM AND DOMINATION
Are we speaking for other people? Are we being "representative"? Knowledgeable expert or imperialist appropriation? Is this outreach, or co-operation? Who has the say, and who has the control? Who's taking up the most space, time or organising power? And who owns the struggle? Are we depicting anyone as defenceless or in need of our strength or resources?

THE MEANING OF SUPPORT
Are we open to honestly challenging ourselves? Examining what is threatening to us, and why... Threatening us because of prejudices, assumptions, bigotry, bias? Or because thorough analysis will lead to us losing power or access? Are we denying anyone access by our voice or presence? Are we becoming comfortable with certain rituals? Look beyond what is defined to be acceptable.

MEN'S ONLY FEMINIST GROUPS
Is it another bubble we are building? Is this protective or defensive at all? Is there transparency? Is there a feedback process? Are those being discussed mostly absent? Who does patriarchy affect most, and is there an ultimate goal to include their voices, input and participation?

"men's work"?

Some women said, "You're doing the violence. You are men. Take responsibility for your actions and address other men." There was a lot of attention paid to the question, "Why are men violent?" Some people argued that men are unalterably aggressive because of their genes, hormones, chromosomes, or just because all males are "that way." None of these "theories" had any scientific legitimacy, however. Male behavior is immeasurably variable.

Most feminists wanted to hold men responsible for their actions and looked to male power and male socialization as sources of male violence. The huge amount of violence promoted in popular culture led them to the conclusion that boys learn male roles, and violent behavior was part of that learning.

Women were hurting from the violence. They were angry at the men who committed violence and the men who condoned it by their silence. We assimilated much of their anger. Partly motivated by self-hatred, we took the anger directed toward us and directed it at other men for not seeing what was happening to women. We used that anger to encourage other men to acknowledge their complicity in the violence. A group of us developed a slide show to be shown to men's groups. We took images from pornography, record covers, magazine ads, and comic books. Most of the images we showed were pictures of women being humiliated, bound, beaten, or raped.

Our motivation was to convey horror, shock, and outrage at how violent the images were. As part of our presentation we read the following poem by ntozake shange:

with no immediate cause*
every 3 minutes a woman is beaten
every five minutes a
woman is raped/ every ten minutes
a lil girl is molested
yet i rode the subway today
i sat next to an old man who
may have beaten his old wife
3 minutes ago or 3 days/ 30 years ago
he might have sodomized his ·
daughter but i sat there
cuz the young men on the train
might beat some young women
later in the day or tomorrow
i might not shut my door fast
enuf/ push · hard enuf

every 3 minutes it happens

some woman's innocence

rushes to her cheeks/ pours from her mouthlike the betsy wetsy dolls have been torn

apart/ their mouths

mensis red & split/ every

three minutes a shoulder

is jammed through plaster & the oven door/

chairs push thru the rib cage/ hot water or

boiling sperm decorate her body

i rode the subway today

& bought a paper from a

man who might

have held his old lady onto

a hot pressing iron/ i dont know

maybe he catches lil girls in the

park & rips open their behinds

with steel rods/ i couldnt decide

what he might have done i only

know every 3 minutes

every 5 minutes every I 0 minutes/so

i bought the paper

looking for the announcement

there has to be an announcement

of the women's bodies found

yesterday/ the missing little girl

i sat in a restaurant with my

paper looking for the announcement

a young man served me coffee

i wondered did he pour the boiling

coffee/ on the woman cuz she waz stupid/

did he put the infant girl/ in

the coffee pot/ with the boiling coffee/ cuz she cried

too much

what exactly did he do with hot coffee

i looked for the announcement

the discovery/ of the dismembered

woman's body/ the

victims have not all been

identified/ today they are

naked & dead! refuse to

testify/ one girl out of 10's not

coherent/ i took the coffee

& spit' it up/ i found an

announcement/ not the woman's

bloated body in the river/ floating

not the child bleeding in the

59th street corridor/ not the baby

broken on the floor/

"there is some concern

that alleged battered women

might start to murder their

SOME POINT FOR Y'ALL TO CONSIDER

SEXISM IN OUR BEDROOMS AND FRIENDSHIPS
Can't control yourselves? Then make a choice not to subject another person to pain and to bear the brunt of your impulses. Don't choose to engage in or perpetuate behaviour that will plausibly hurt others, especially if we claim to care about them or their boundaries of safety.

JUSTICE vs JUDGEMENT
Cases of police brutality and authoritative violence are condemned, but we will justify our own actions of abuse or assault of others, that usually come out of our own positions of power. Political prisoners are hailed, or defended as wrongly charged, but we are quick to make judgements and condemn others - to ostracise, restrict or militantly beat up people based on hearsay, our own assumptions and decisions, without dialogue.

NEAR vs FAR AFIELD
We will fight tooth and nail to defend asylum seekers at Calais but not give time over to or listen to non-white or non-local brothers and sisters in our own neighbourhoods or collectives.

APOLOGISTS + LOCALISATION
"That guy over there is a dick and a bad dude due to this singular point, but this guy over here is okay cos he's my mate, and his fucked-up behaviour is merely circumstantial."

ETHNOCENTRICISM
Some class war manarchists say that identity politics from feminists or immigrants are taking over.................. but have they noticed the white men that have been taking over for aeons?

ACTION vs OPINION
Dissent, protest, and loudly/vocally complaining about the things we all agree are crappy is one thing... But when was the last time we've acted toward tangibly changing any of those crappy conditions?

EFFORT IN MERCY
Decisive measures are quick and clean and controlled. What about open-ended choices that require more time and work, but are perhaps fairer? They might be messy, but people are messy, and it takes work to wade through it.

I write this as an introduction to a piece about men's groups, because in my work and personal life I've come across some tell-tale signs that people are reluctant to take on ideas that don't align with their own, even whilst participating in spaces that suggest they are open to these. They have been mostly white cis-male people who are fairly established or comfortable in their 'scenes'. These cues indicate initial defensiveness, or a fixed, unbudging one. For example, I have heard:

"So, what's your point?"

"What has that got to do with me or my privilege?"

"That's not sexist, that's just our dynamic"

"That's not racist, it's a joke"

"That's not rape if he's her/your partner"

"I don't think that's [physically/emotionally] abusive if that is an understanding between them"

"I'm not homophobic, but don't you think that's a bit gay?"

"Well, I'm going to keep doing it, and if she has a problem with it, then she can tell me to stop."

"Everyone is equal, so why are we talking about this?"

"Identity politics is divisive to the class movement"

"Anti-oppression work is middle class and merely social work"

"I don't think she's telling the truth"

"Oh, that is just coming out of anger/emotion"

"I'm sorry, but I can't control my actions/behaviour"

"White privilege theory does not apply in the UK, just settler societies"

[anger or nervous laughter] "I don't need to listen to this"

"Now this is making me just feel terribly guilty"

"It's feminist scum like you that makes me hate women."

"I think they deserve what they get."

"I'm anti-authoritarian/autonomous/a punk/a misanthrope, so you can't tell me how to act."

husbands & lovers with no
immediate cause"
i spit up i vomit i am screaming
we all have immediate cause
every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes
every 10 minutes
every day
women's bodies are found
in alleys & bedrooms/ at the top of the stairs
before i ride the subway/ buy -a paper/ drink
coffee/ i must know/ have you hurt a woman today
did you beat a woman today
throw a child cross a room
are the lil girl's panties
in yr pocket
did you hurt a woman today
i have to ask these obscene questions
the authorities require me to
establish
immediate cause
every. three minutes
every five minutes
every ten. minutes
every day

* ntozake shange, nappy edges (New York: Bantam Books, 1978)

This is a very upsetting poem. You may feel angry, guilty, or ashamed after reading it. When presented with facts about the costs of male violence against women, as we are in this poem, we cannot escape the horror of the reality. I don't spend any time in this book citing statistics because the numbers only mask the reality. We need only open the daily newspaper to read the stories. We need only listen to the women we know talk about their experiences to know the truth.

Men must listen to women's pain and anger. The fact that it is safe enough for women to publicly express that anger is an indication of important change in our society. It means that women are challenging male perceptions of sex, gender, rape, exploitation, and abuse. They are describing parts of our common reality that are tremendously destructive to all of us.

But if we just accept those perceptions without confirming them through our own experience, we will eventually reject and turn against the source of those perceptions—the strong women around us. This happens when we respond to women's anger with guilt, shame, or defensiveness. In many cases these feelings eventually lead to a backlash against women. The defensiveness becomes counterattack; we blame women for the powerlessness of men or try to protect the power that men have.

Instead we need to take the pain and anger in ntozake shange's poem as a probe into a reality we often deny. We need to look at our own lives and experiences. We need to grapple with the issues, not the anger, until we can understand the truth of what shange says—not because she says it, but because we have confirmed that she is right. Then, and only then, do we become committed to making personal and social changes because we know what is at stake for women and for us.

Evoking this kind of response from men called for an entirely different educational approach than reading angry poems and showing slides of women being brutalized. It meant we had to come together and, with absolute honesty, share and compare our experiences growing up and living as men, analyze women's experiences as they described them, and piece through the causes and costs of our violence.

But the old methods of lecture and slide presentation were hard to let go. They made us the "good" men with the "right" ideas and allowed us to feel powerful by attacking and berating other men. We became the best liberated men on the block, and that became another way of winning women's approval and attention. It also allowed us to feel self-righteous toward other men.

We took our presentation with its slides and poem and testimony to many different men's group. Some men were shocked and outraged, others weren't. Shock and outrage did not necessarily lead men to sustained commitment and action to end violence. Nor did it help our audiences understand how the system of male violence worked, or how it affected them personally.

We told men they were powerful, privileged, and responsible for the violence. The men we talked with did not agree. They told us they felt angry, hurt, vulnerable, and powerless. We didn't believe them at first, because we had a lot at stake in being right. After all, we were the teachers and they were the students. We were supposed to have the right answers.

Then we took the workshops to some junior high classes, bringing the message that men were strong and powerful in the world and women weren't. The young men said they were trying to be powerful and weren't. The young women refused the label of victim. Both the men and women thought that women were not as vulnerable as we were saying they were. We couldn't hear them either.

Over the next two years we looked at what wasn't working in our workshops. People loved discussing the slides, but they didn't buy what we were saying. We finally had to acknowledge that teen men are not powerful in our society. They are primarily victims and survivors of family, community, and institutional violence. We had to acknowledge as well that the young women, while vulnerable to violence, were not passive victims but survivors trying to make it in a hostile environment.

Do we perpetuate exclusion and inaccessibility or is there an attempt to mediate or bridge?

I ask this of organisers of spaces/events, activists and writers of anti-oppressive ideologies.

I have been writing, in "public", for 18 months. In practice and in verbal communication I like to think that I demonstrate the utopic/dystopic notions, which permeate through my actions and words to others, like an involuntary osmosis.

This is a problematic stance, and I'm aware of it. To hope to influence people. To project or force one's stance, and take up all the space. Idealism is a bedfellow of authoritarianism.

So this is a plea for openness... To allow people to take on what they are willing to accept, but also to be better listeners and show some fucking empathy.

I spent the last 4 or so years working in transformative justice. Still do. Straddling a fine line between heavy indoctrination and accommodating for others' reluctance to adapt their behaviour so that they no longer hurt people. I spent the last 2 years or so dedicated to the re-education of white men regarding the way they habitually assaulted and abused women and people of colour. This was also the sole reason I started to write zines.

When I started this work, I would spend hours in session with one individual, waiting for something to register. Since then, I have developed a skill over time to let stubborn creatures be, and pursue change where it seems more welcome.



MOVING PAST OUR OWN BORDERS

by Anna Vo

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I'm flicking through an insurrectionary magazine - not important which one - and I'm enjoying reading about struggles from around the world. It's great to see photos from actions from last week, last month, etc, and to see people build hope from collective or individual efforts of resistance.

It strikes my mind that as the pages go on, the images are repeating themselves - black blocs, banner drops, smashed ATMs and perimetre collisions with armoured authorities. I wonder, is this the endgoal? Do these pictures communicate that this is what revolution looks like? Do we hope to fight in order to end the casualties and oppression of capitalism, or do we aspire to display our athletic capabilities for the cameras? Are we projecting onto ourselves and each other these idealised snapshots of first world warzones - urban and suburban conflicts of our own making - and depicting them as an end, as opposed to a means?

What do we create, when we make a tangible communiqué?

What do we model in our actions and through how we organise?

To be a true ally to women we had to hear their anger and understand its source in their feelings of hopelessness and experiences of violence.

We came to see that boys and girls are hurt as children, violated, and rendered powerless. They are recipients of adult, primarily male, violence. Boys are taught to pass on the violence to others. Girls are expected to become victims of this violence. All men were victims of the system as young people. So the key to doing effective work with men was to understand how we had been trained, the pain we had suffered, and yet still hold ourselves accountable for the violence we perpetuated. We had to create a way to understand the connection between social training and individual responsibility. We learned how to do this through a process of trial and error.

During that period we learned that men who speak out and take actions against sexism contradict the lies that men are inevitably abusive to women, that men will never change, and that they can't be trusted by women. We found that when we made mistakes, said the wrong thing, or acted out our own sexism inadvertently, women got angry at us. Having invited their trust, we ended up hurting them. Sometimes this made us very cautious. We were reluctant to antagonize women or to be incorrect.

To be a true ally to women we had to hear their anger and understand its source in their feelings of hopelessness and experiences of violence. We learned how to listen, take criticism, and make changes while continuing to take risks. We were doing this work to reduce the violence. It was not just another way to wrangle women's support, approval, or gratitude.

We also experienced anger from men as we spoke out. Some of them felt deserted, unfairly blamed, or saw us as hypocritical. To counteract this anger we learned that it was crucial not to fault or attack other men for the lies and training they have received. By caring for and accepting them, while confronting their beliefs and attitudes, we were able to demonstrate the strong and loving alliances against injustice that are possible between men. The next sections show some of the ways that the staff at the Oakland Men's Project have tried to model this kind of approach.

As we developed the role plays, the power chart, and other exercises we use in workshops, we also developed a way of relating to people, of being teachers, that we felt was consistent with the content of our work. The basic educational methods of Oakland Men's Project developed as we grappled with the issues of power and violence, gender roles, and racism. Over time the goals and mission of the project grew into the following statements.

Mission Statement

Abuse of power and violence are taken for granted in our society and dominate our lives and relationships. We are trained that the way to get power is to wield it over someone who is, within the social milieu, less powerful. Hurting others through physical and sexual assault, harassment, exploitation and discrimination, or hurting ourselves through suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, and other self-destructive behaviors creates a cycle of violence, pain, and hurt.

Social institutions and individual practices maintain this cycle, producing violence, lack of equality, poverty, and physical and mental disability for all of us. As men, we are particularly trained to perpetuate violence, domination, and oppression.

The Oakland Men's Project's mission is to challenge the cycle of violence and the social structures that perpetuate it. All people can learn to be powerful without being abusive. Together, we can develop alternatives to violence. We can change the institutions that perpetuate violence. The Oakland Men's Project provides the information, support, resources, and training necessary to build violence-free, equal, and respectful relationships and communities.

Goals

1. To CHALLENGE the cycle of violence through active intervention in people's assumptions of continued abuse and victimization.
2. To EMPOWER individuals to come together and reach beyond/out to each other to build community responses to violence and oppression.
3. To UNDERSTAND men's unique training to perpetuate violence, and to challenge each of us to unlearn that training.
4. To SUPPORT the struggle of each person to overcome pain, hurt, and learned helplessness, to heal and become a more powerful community member.
5. To PROVIDE young people with the information, support, resources, and encouragement they need to create violence-free relationships and communities.
6. To UNDERSTAND and make connections between all the complicated ways power and abuse are worked out in our lives and in society.

I'm including a quote from Michel Foucault and a small part of a response from a workshop here in Tucson called "becoming human again." I owe a lot of these ideas and threads to certain folks and thanks goes out to timo and stephanie, qui, v-dog, andy smith, george, lee edelman and jose munoz, for their writing and work. Look em up! And my community abroad and local, always growing and heaving, pulsing with vibrancy and life. Let's lean into each other; hold onto one another through these vast and tumultuous days. Anyways, I love you a bunch and think of you often, I hope this letter affirms that and finds you well and healthy.

A toast to "the subversion of all codes, a dislocation of all orders of knowledge and an overturning of all contemporary culture."

MF

From the "Becoming Human Again" workshop in Tucson, 2013.

What do the womyn in the room need/want from male allies?

- a willingness to listen- active, whole-hearted listening as support
- to take initiative to do work in self and with other men, not waiting for provocation or prodding from womyn to take action.
- acknowledging/owning mistakes
- putting oneself out there to call out male perpetrators. stepping into or up to oppressive situations to call out fucked up behavior; creating better examples of what it means to own ones identity and socialization.
- materially supporting women/trans/queer movements. (child care, cleaning and cooking, etc.)
- stepping back from being THE or even A voice of the movement
- having this conversation with young men and boys.

What do the womyn in the room NOT need/want from male allies?

- to minimize, discredit or devalue womyn EVER!

It's true that we need to fight in opposition to this system and its conditionings. There is also the long slow and painful art of redefining ourselves, our relationships and the creation and growth of our radical communities.

Working in opposition is critical, for sure. I think we simultaneously have to be careful not to fall into the traps of reproducing this fucked up system. Again, I don't think there is one way to do this. Yet if we always position ourselves and struggles in the frame of 'against' we aren't necessarily holding space for all the very hard very important work of 'for.' Like being 'for' effective radical transformative accountability processes and radical self/community-care and healing.

So can we strike a balance?

Also, instead of working for a 'better future' so to speak, defined by the current social order, how can we shift the focus to bring about an end to this social order?

A call for 'no future,' or a complete end to the current social system.

What can that look like? Being 'in opposition' as well as 'in non-correspondence.' Of wresting our complicated selves and communities from the calcifying, dulling and homogenizing definitions and structures that are so often passed over in our rush to take on the work.

So my dearest, please think deep.

What are our goals in starting men's groups? Who are you and how do you see/know yourself? In relation to others? How do you interrelate across difference? With womyn, with gender-plural folks, folks that have a different skin color, speak a different language, come from a different economic status? How are we going to challenge the old pillars of heteropatriarchy that rest on the idea that "I am me because I am not you?"

How are we going to avoid the traps of reproducing fucked up patriarchal patterns and congradualism? Yup, definitely made up that word.

So what are your goals in starting this men's group and where are you coming from? Think deep, my dearest.

So there's some stuff to ponder on before you start this project. I think men's groups CAN be effective in challenging patriarchy IF certain notions are acknowledged and brought into focus. In the long and arduous struggle to heal and redefine our selves and communities I believe aware and intentional men's groups have the potential to hold perpetrators accountable aiding in community healing and care.

It might be helpful to begin from what you want to do, not necessarily from who you are friends with.

7. To PROMOTE a variety of powerful and effective alternatives to violence in social and personal situations.
8. To CONFRONT the violence of local institutions and social practice.
9. To MODEL, in all of these areas, the powerful role that men can take in breaking the cycle of violence.

We also developed an understanding of how the issues of power, violence, and oppression need to be translated into an approach for working with people that does not further the violence, but instead contributes to people's liberation. The basic ideas are set forth below.

These are dry principles, hard to use without concrete examples. The descriptions of workshops and thoughts about men's lives in my book *Men's Work: How to Stop the Violence that Tears Our Lives Apart* are intended to give a fuller understanding of what we do and why we do it.

Goals and Assumptions

Overall Goal One: Empower each individual present.

Assumptions:

- When a person makes choices—in areas of attitudes, actions, and values—they are made as the best perceived survival strategy at that time.
- Empowering individuals is partly a process of healing previous pain, hurt, and disempowerment.
- Attitudes held with emotional intensity need to be worked through emotionally to be changed. Information alone does not change attitudes.
- Individual growth and empowerment come from an individual's ability to put together information and past and present experiences into a conscious, emotional, and intellectual process of change.
- Empowerment happens best and is maintained most strongly with group support.
- People become empowered through active participation.
- Seeds of change can lie dormant for a long time.

Overall Goal Two: Encourage each person to be more active and involved.

Assumptions:

• An individual's personal empowerment comes through involvement in community activity.

• Individual growth without community activity is inherently limited and is of little value to our community.

• Powerlessness is reflected in inactivity, apathy, and cynicism.

• Community activity breaks down isolation, self blame, guilt, misinformation, and extreme individualism—all of which are factors in powerlessness.

• Community activity helps people learn about the systems of power that personally disempower us.

• Community activity is not necessarily organized, formal, or traditional. Each person can and must define his or her own way to be active.

Overall Goal Three: Creating group solidarity, support networks, and an understanding of connection.

Assumptions:

• We are all connected.

• We are disempowered by believing we are separate individuals and by fearing others and not cooperating.

• Our greatest resources are in our own community.

• In any group of people, there is tremendous power to unleash, and each group already has the information and experience it needs to empower itself and its members.

• Individual empowerment happens most easily and effectively when it is supported and nurtured by group energy and action.

• Group energy snowballs to people outside the group.

struct in the first place. Like the congratulatory structure of confessionalism. I think I made up that word, but you know what I mean. I think we've probably all seen it in one form or another. The confession of privileges, or offenses, is prioritized over collective action. Stagnation. Lack of checks and balances from different folks with different experiences. Like how men create a 'safe space' for other men to 'confess' their privileges and conditionings to one another, pay penance as such, pat one another on the back and go home feeling like good feminists or whatever.

I don't want to demonize support and different structures of care and healing. On the contrary really.

I just feel like men confessing to and affirming other men isn't the same as being accountable. Nor should it be interpreted as implicit solidarity with womyn, trans or queer folk. The real deeper work of being and living in solidarity as allies begins with a radical re-conception of self, other and community. All the time. Because there also isn't a plateau you are going to get to where you can brush your hands off, claiming to have reached official ally status. The work is life. It doesn't end but only gets deeper and richer and fuller, like a lake in a thunderstorm.

I think a men's group project has to have its roots in self/community-care and healing. 'Cause if folks don't care, why would we work with/on ourselves and other men? This may sound kinda intense but for real, think about it, and feel free to disagree, but if folks didn't care about working with perpetrators to heal, to change, then accountability isn't able to function. You just say fuck 'em.

And that materializes in different ways and shouldn't be excluded and is totally necessary too. Sometimes perpetrators aren't a part of our community and accountability can't move forward so they are dealt with in other means. And that's real and that's ok. There is no one way, one prescriptive answer or method to effectively challenge and destroy patriarchy in our vast communities and complicated selves. And just as I think we need to strive to strike a balance between theory, action and reflection, we also need to struggle to find a balance between self-care, community healing, critical reflection and accountability.

It's like how the idea of transformative justice parallels prison abolition. It is based off the assumption that no one deserves to be locked in a cage right. And the transformative justice model isn't like, let's work with perpetrators to get them to back to being productive members of society. It's like, fuck society! Why in the hell would we do that? It's this very system that produced these notions and material realities of heteropatriarchal racist classist violence. No, we need to critically look at that shit, throw it out, question them notions all over the place to find our truer needs and strategies as radicals working and living for collective liberation.

I think it's important for folks to think about these notions on all levels really. From the deeply philosophical to the grounded in relation to others, political movements, affinities, working groups (such as men's groups) and other forms of relating and working together and across difference.

I know these questions are indistinct and opaque, but they are so often glazed over to take on the more 'important' issues. If these unconscious notions are not questioned or acknowledged how can we be accountable to our socializations, where we are coming from, and the world we truly want to create?

So many activist projects move from a place of action without analysis, or analysis without action or reflection. But without a balanced rotation of theory, action and reflection how can we effectively learn to change the world and ourselves?

I know this may seem abstract but please remember, I'm writing you because I care about you, and I want us ultimately to be accountable to the communities and projects we are a part of.

I've been thinking a lot recently about radical self-and community-care and healing. I've been thinking about how the "radical" is the tip of the root, the source of the life so to speak. That when we call ourselves "radical," it means we follow the notions all the way back, that we untangle the roots to reveal these interlocking systems of oppression, how they feed one another, feed off of us, and rely on us to reproduce them. So as radicals, we have to follow those notions back. Right.

Radical self/community-care/healing cannot begin until our preconceived or internalized ways of being have once again submerged to their watery graves. Their inundated origins.

From this dissolving, deconstructing, taking apart and queering, we can begin to uncover the insidious conditionings we're afflicted with in differing capacities. Our internalized homophobia, transphobia, heteropatriarchy, racism, classism, ableism, etc. It's all there, to differing degrees, subtle and lurking under the broadside of our thoughts and actions. Not to mention assaulting us externally from all sides day and night.

So again, dearest friend, how are we going to form our men's groups and other anti-pat groups so as to move away from the trap of perpetuating oppressive structures?

Maybe not to begin, but to remember to always come back around again in rotational fashion; I think we need to re-conceptualize or critically question our foundation of self, of other, of what it means to know oneself, to know others, to interrelate and get to work.

For example, I've noticed these structures, almost invisible, working behind our words to reconstruct a frame that inevitably reproduces the same shit we were trying to decon-

The following are guidelines for Oakland Men's Project staff to use in facilitating workshops and trainings:

- Model, encourage, and support strength, openness, respect, growth, trust, love, and cooperation.
- Provide information.
- Respect the intelligence of everyone at all times.
- Help each person identify personal issues and solutions to problems.
- Provide a framework to aid in personal problem solving.
- Provide lots of options and encourage the creation of new options for problem solving.
- Do not try to force change on anyone.
- Prevent people from trashing one another, being rude, lecturing others, having attitudes of disrespect, attitudes of "correct" information, or "correct" politics are each nonempowering.
- Taking small steps toward effectively dealing with issues, and participating in activities pertinent to those issues, are important and need to be encouraged.
- It needs to be acknowledged that people are already doing a lot of work to improve themselves and their communities.
- As outsiders to any particular group, we can focus attention on the issues, facilitate discussions of people's experiences of power, share information, and focus on group self-consciousness.
- Refer the group back to its own resources.
- Emphasize that the group obtain information and services through nonprofessional sources and networks that already exist.
- In most general situations, and in some specific aspects of all situations, emphasize there are some common issues.
- Help to break down the insularity of family and relationship concepts that prevent community intervention.
- Model and practice community intervention: friends and family reaching out to each other.
- Talk from the heart.

Think About It

by a Feminist by default

Why Feminist?

Simply to love oneself, as a woman, is to be labelled **feminist**. To view oneself as every bit as valuable as a man is to be labelled **feminist**. To respect one's body, as a woman, enough to demand that it is treated so, and to speak up when it is disrespected, is in this society to be labelled **feminist**. To care enough for the health of other women that one calls for drastic changes in a medical system that drastically undermines women's health, is to be labelled **feminist**. To fight back against rape and abuse and then to defend that stance, is to be labelled **feminist**. To refuse to accept the degradation of one's perceived gender as status quo, is to be labelled **feminist**. To demand respect in arenas where it is not often given, is to be labelled **feminist**. To be as loud as a man, as proud as a man, as confident as a man, to take up as much space as a man and to expect to be treated with as much worth as a man, to be independent, to voice opinions, to not back down when attacked, to do any of these things as a woman is to be labelled impolite, antagonistic, inappropriate, out of line, masculine, and otherwise to be labelled as **feminist**.

I did not choose to be **feminist**. I simply am a woman and am committed to being respected as such. But in a society where "woman" is synonymous with object, with disrespect, with the weaker-sex, I cannot simply be myself. And so myself is labelled **feminist**. And so, as such, I accept the label and I stand and fight.

My Dearest

by C. B. Egret

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I've been thinking of you lately and wanted to share a bit in regards to that men's group you wanted to start. I hope that's ok.

I've been thinking about how we cannot be in the movement, work for the movement, move forward for real unless we question the notions that you and I are operating under. 'Cause why are the same dynamics that perpetuate hate, violence, misogyny, and heteropatriarchy perpetuated and used in the struggle for collective liberation?

I want to support you in starting a men's group.

I know that you have the best of intentions and you're a good persyn. But I'm concerned as well and I'm writing you because I care about you. I don't have a lot of experience with men's groups particularly, but I do think a lot about different organizing strategies and wanted to share these thoughts.

I've seen this pattern before, where we move forward, we organize without looking at the foundations we operate from.

So I think it's important to ask: what are our goals and where are we coming from?

No, not just the surface answer that we think would sound good in a meeting, that would give us scene cred or affirmative nods. Really, we need to dig deeper.

Look deeper into our preconceived ways of seeing ourselves and others in the world. Seriously, how do you know yourself? How do you see yourself? How do we define ourselves in distinction to 'others'? What does 'other' mean to you; folks with different cultures, histories, bodies, experiences. What does community look like? What are we working for? And is there any way to do it alone?

Socialization, internalization and societal conditionings are insidious and often taken-for-granted or not acknowledged in our rush to take on the 'system.' It is a sticky question. It's meant to trigger all the deeper often not thought of notions of how we understand ourselves as individuals, subjective monads as distinct from community, collaboration, kinships, relationships, etc.

Where do we go from here?

Why Ally?

Simply to be born as a man in a patriarchal world, is to hold an imbalance of power under patriarchy. To view yourself as just yourself, rather than in relation to a dominant gender group other than your own, is a power of patriarchy. To know that your body will be represented and respected in the social world, is a power of patriarchy. To not have to know or care about how other gendered bodies are treated in the medical system, is a power of patriarchy. To seldom have to fear rape or even have to take a stance against it, is a power of patriarchy. To accept that additional resources and privileges are awarded to the male gender as the status quo, is a power of patriarchy. To receive respect even when it's not earned, is a power of patriarchy. To be loud, proud, confident, to take up space and to expect to be treated with worth, to be independent, to voice opinions, to not back down when attacked, to do any of these things as a man is to be seen as assertive, charismatic, ambitious, dynamic, strong, manly, and otherwise to hold the power of patriarchy.

You may not have chosen to be given this power under patriarchy. You may simply be assigned as male and so identify and present as such. But in a society where "man" is synonymous with power, with dominance, with the greater-sex, you cannot simply stand by. You are a man in a "man's world" with all the powers that patriarchy holds. And so, as such, it is your responsibility to fight that structure of unbalanced power. It is your responsibility to choose to be an **ally**.

Exercise:

1. Think about the powers that you hold as a man. Write down what these powers are.

2. Think about how that power affects you, other genders, and society as a whole. Write down what these effects are.

There is one wrinkle in here that I'm not as quick to dismiss: in order to do meaningful work on overcoming our participation in sexism, men sometimes need to be able to discuss openly the kinds of anti-woman attitudes and behaviors that we have been taught, and the kinds of behaviors we feel bad about having participated in. And we may feel like women shouldn't have to listen to this crap. And that's true, they indeed shouldn't have to. But again, a woman who is willing to listen to it, which is painful for her, and is willing to call us on it and push us on it, is giving us a gift. So rather than creating a men-only space, it makes much more sense to declare that the space is going to be devoted to looking at men's issues, but that women who are willing to offer assistance or accountability are welcome to join us.

And if you aren't prepared to admit your past anti-female actions in front of a woman who is listening in the present, you aren't serious about changing your future behavior anyhow; we shouldn't be in the business of offering men a confessional where they can cleanse their guilt and escape the past. Don't bring up the ugly shit you've done (the ugly shit we've all done, to one extent or another) unless you're serious about facing it, repairing the damage, and treating women properly in the future.

One last comment from me, that is kind of related and kind of not: While I believe that it's important to think of our work as ending sexism and overcoming male domination, I also think it's valuable to use a frame of "developing our commitment and our ability to be good allies to women in overcoming oppression." These may just be two ways of saying the same thing, but I've noticed that the second frame sometimes helps us to move toward more concrete action and therefore to actually be a greater help. For example, I think it's great for men to become aware of our language and tone and body posture, and how those all contribute to controlling or intimidating women; but sometimes that work is actually easier than getting off our asses and cleaning the bathroom, making dinner, and looking after children (our own and other people's) so that women can have the time and energy to be leaders in the fight for their own liberation, and for the liberation of the planet.

And besides, one of the things that women are the most sick of is cleaning up after us.

I notice this issue at Earth First! gatherings, where men will walk through a shared space that is a total pigsty and never think to pick up the junk or grab a broom and sweep the place up. Many of the most important ways to be an anti-sexist male are not very glamorous; we need to overcome our addiction to the spotlight. Most women I've spoken with have expressed the preference that we stop apologizing for being male, which just adds to the female burden of having to take emotional care of us, and instead focus on doing what needs to be done.

It's terrific that we're working hard to be better men. Let's keep at it.

So rather than creating a men-only space, it makes much more sense to declare that the space is going to be devoted to looking at men's issues, but that women who are willing to offer assistance or accountability are welcome to join us.

to our work; unfortunately a number of other men at the gathering did not take that view, and they expressed their desire that she not attend. The woman quickly withdrew her request, concerned not to step on toes; but I left the interaction feeling bad about our exclusivity, bad about our attachment to privilege, and bad about the failure to embrace her generous offer.

As a target group, women have good reason to want to know what is happening in men's group; and I have known a number of men's groups over the years that really needed women present to call them on what they were doing, because some really messed up stuff – antiwoman stuff, specifically -- was starting to happen there. Why shouldn't women be concerned, given the history of what happens to women's interests when men gather in groups? And why shouldn't we be eager for their assistance in keeping us on track and accountable?

For example, I was a co-director for years of a counseling program for men who abuse women, and we welcomed women to sit in and observe our counseling groups and give us feedback on the work we were doing. And I have always encouraged women's groups to be highly mistrustful of any abuser program that won't let women monitor the groups.

Now you might respond, "But Lundy, those are abuser groups; whereas we're talking about groups of good men working on their personal growth and overcoming sexism." But the women who monitored our groups weren't there to give feedback to our clients; they were there to give feedback to the counselors, those of us who were working to be good allies but still had huge blind spots.

I've heard a number of men say, "I just can't express myself as openly when women are present; I end up self-conscious and feeling that I have to censor myself." I have a couple of comments about this, but my main response is that the very fact that you can't speak as openly with women present is a huge red flag, glaringly sending the message that there are issues there that you need to take a serious look at. Let me use a parallel again, as I did above; how would we react to a white person who said, "I just can't express myself freely if people of color are in the room, so I need a whites-only space."? I think we would tell them to get over it, and fast.

3. Think about why you choose to be an ally. Write down what your reasons are.

4. Now think about how you will be an ally. Write down practical ways that you will challenge the unbalance of power and work to dismantle patriarchy within yourself and beyond.

What can we accomplish?

Dudes in a House

by Toby

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Living with other dudes hasn't always filled me with a sense of joy and community. For a lot of my "not living with my parents" life, living with other guys has been a means to cheaper rent, a bigger music selection, and some surface level friendship (i.e. "drinking buddy"). It's only been for the past several years that male housemates have turned into people I can turn to for support and care, for real friendship (even when we're sober!), people I can get help dealing with my shit from, and who can turn to me for the same. Needless to say, it's much more fulfilling living with these dudes than it ever was before.

Contrastingly, some men stay quite bound up in the male stereotype while actually being very decent to women and not trying to keep women down.

So I believe we often have exaggerated the connections between these two aspects of "men's work".

And the key point for me is that, because of our socialized tendency to being self-focused, men's work tends to keep drifting, either slowly or rapidly, toward the direction of putting most of our energy into freeing ourselves, and the more crucial work of getting our gender off of the necks of women keeps slipping into the background.

Now I'll get to what this all adds up to for me with respect to men's groups: I don't believe in the creation of men-only spaces.

Here's why: First of all, women already face a huge array of places in the world where they are either unwelcome, openly excluded, or put in danger if they enter them. (For example, the simple act of daring to walk alone is dangerous to women through so much of the world, from a city street to a trail in the woods.) Given this context, I don't think we want to participate for any reason in creating spaces where women can't go.

And I think of the parallel to other oppression dynamics; how would we react if, at some gathering, someone stood up to announce, "We are going to have a caucus of rich white people to work on our issues, and we don't want anyone attending who isn't rich and white"? I certainly hope we would tell them to go have their caucus at the bottom of the lake.

Secondly, as a dominant group, we have the responsibility to make ourselves accountable to the target group. This principle means that if women want to attend men's groups to give us feedback and to raise concerns about the directions we're going in, we need to have them there (and their presence will be great for our work).

This issue came up concretely at the Earth First! Winter Rendezvous in February, 2013, because a woman asked to attend the men's gathering that was planned on the Saturday. My view of her request was that she was actually offering us an important gift by being willing to put her time and effort into contributing

Keeping Men's Work Accountable

by Lundy Bancroft

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One of the most powerful aspects of male socialization in the modern world is the extent to which we are taught to be self-centered and self-serving, focusing on our own needs first and everybody else's second. This training is in sharp contrast to the male role as it tended to be formulated in earlier, less patriarchal tribes and societies, where it was common for boys to grow up being taught that they must provide for others, focus on the common good, and put their own needs in the background. In order to be effective allies to women in their liberation, we need to keep working on overcoming our self-involvement and being able to put much more of our effort into meeting the needs of others (while of course not ignoring what we need ourselves).

I find it important to attend to these underlying dynamics as we think about how to do "men's work" and how to have men's groups. There are two somewhat contrasting goals of typical men's work; one is to free men from the limitations of the male stereotype, and the other is to overcome male domination and work to be allies to women in their liberation from oppression.

People often describe these two kinds of work as two halves of one whole, but I believe this is a mistaken view, for an extensive number of reasons that I won't take the space to go deeply into right now. But the short version is simply this: Men can do a lot of work to free themselves from the box of traditional masculinity, and yet still treat women in disrespectful and exploitative ways. (I deal with this dynamic a lot in my work life, because I specialize in counseling for men who abuse women, and many of my clients have been Mr. Sensitive / Mr. Progressive kinds of guys in public while being total pigs to women in private.)

Men's groups have come and gone in my life- some great, some poor, and some the word "group" is too big of a compliment. Part of the big problem early on with my experimenting was that I didn't really get it, didn't know what the point of a men's group was. I just knew that female socialized friends had mentioned at least a few times that it would be great if "all you guys would get together and talk". So why not, we talk all the time (aaaallllll the time). We'd get together every so often, pat ourselves on the back a few times about getting together, talk about figuring out what to talk about, then pick the next meeting time.... Not the most transformative to say the least.

All of this was happening at the same time as house meetings where the same few things were always talked about: who keeps leaving those dishes; at the last party I barely said a word because dudes were talking the whole time; my favorite bowl is still dirty; I'm sick of getting interrupted; who is hoarding all the mugs; only the guys are able to do the fun construction projects; maybe we should slow down on drinking; the sink is literally too full of dishes to get drinking water; don't put soap in the cast irons! Sure, it wasn't just the guys leaving behind dirty dishes, but a lot of the problems were ours. The dudes at the house decided that we should get together to get our shit together.

In thinking about what it was we should do during our meetings, and how we should go about "fixing" things, we made a couple profound (for us) realizations. First, we couldn't just "fix" everything. What would it matter if all the dudes in the house agreed to make sure to do all the dishes that got left behind? Sure, no more dish discussion at the house meetings (think of how short they would be!). Patriarchy gone? Sadly no. The same was true for any issue that we might try to deal with in our house- from who uses the power tools, to who takes up more space, to who feels comfortable at parties. This isn't to say that it's a waste of time to make sure that our living environments are as safe and healthy as possible; but that if our work ends at the fence-line we've missed the point.

There are zillions of reasons why it's important to start some kind of men's group and house issues was our first one. We also wanted to recognize that it shouldn't always be female-socialized friends pointing out problems; but to take some responsibility for ourselves, and deal with it together. While none of us had been called out for sexual assault, it's mostly dudes who are- so we wanted to be prepared to help deal with that situation if it arose. It also isn't just in times of extreme violence like sexual assault that patriarchy rears its ugly head. The day to day passive violence of patriarchy is what makes those incidents of active violence possible : The willingness to interrupt female socialized people more often than male socialized; instantly believing another guy, while endlessly questioning the fact/judgment/ideas of women friends; dudes being generally incapable of showing love and care; talking longer and louder all the time thereby taking up all the available space; having the attitude that guys are "just cooler"; sexualizing women's bodies through anything from surreptitious stares to crude jokes and comments; the list could be pages long. The point is, we live in a society biased towards men (and white people, and wealthier people, and hetero people, and able-bodied people…), and the result of being a man is having a lot of privilege. And it's usually invisible. All the things we don't have to notice, don't ever see or hear about, and certainly never have to think about if we don't want to… those are the things that men's groups need to be working on.

Unfortunately no men's group alone is going to get rid of patriarchy and create a more just and equitable society where everyone can be who they are without fear and pain. But I know that in my life it's been the times I've been with other guys (whether in formal groups or just hanging out and having real discussions) that have been the best times to work through my lifetime of socialization as a male. To some extent we know what the other person is going through, I am able to empathize with how hard it is to challenge those privileges and get to the bottom of why I treat people the way I do. It's other guys who are able to support me when I make a mistake and need help figuring out what I did, and how not to do it again. Without some intentional space to make that possible it usually just doesn't get talked about.

some more questions ive heard being discussed or have thought of myself, that might light a fire under the ass of some people wanting to be in a men's group are:

- who have you abused in your life? how?
- what comes to mind when you think about how the majority of the women and trans people you know could be survivors of sexual assault?
- what do you have to gain from talking about your life experiences with other people relating to having male privilege?
- what experiences have made you want to be accountable to people you have hurt?
- how has your gender socialisation shaped your practice of consent? your sense of entitlement?
- what makes you different from other "men"?
- have you ever used the rhetoric of feminist allyship to gain credibility, or to seem attractive, to feminists you thought were cool / hot?
- when you become down on yourself because of the amount of work you need to do to unlearn patriarchal indoctrination, how do you stay brave?

im frustrated with the perpetrator for wasting my energy, but im frustrated with the other members as well for not acting with a sense of urgency (regardless of whether they knew about the instance of assault or not). because the way i see it, it should be assumed that as long as we are all raised in western civilised culture, that there will be oppression within our radical circles that we take different roles in and need to work tirelessly to deconstruct. and if people identifying with having male privilege in one way or another want to address patriarchal indoctrination within and amongst themselves, and the violence that follows from it, then they shouldn't be making more work for the rest of us in doing so. if men's groups operated with the assumption that any one of them may have already assaulted or abused people and could again at any time, the conversations might look different. instead of this potentiality disappearing into the space of tolerated, invisiblised violence like rape so often does, it would be getting discussed. and those of us who are not benefiting from male privilege wouldn't have to feel like it was on us to make sure that was happening…

because whatever men are doing, the truth is that being a survivor and knowing so many other survivors means that the urgency to address gendered and sexualized violence is not a choice for me. i will be preoccupied with safety because i understand that i have to be, especially since i don't see people picking up the slack as much as they could. because of this, i end up using the energy i could otherwise put into being emotionally supportive to a survivor doing what i see as damage control through political and intellectual work around sexual violence prevention and accountability processes (in particular, using the concepts of transformative justice). it's not fair to survivor(s) that their needs often get neglected because theyre less urgent than the need to stop rapists from raping. moreover, it should go without saying that survivors of any gender shouldn't feel like we have to be the ones doing this work. on either end. above and beyond figuring out how to hold each other accountable, men's groups need a way to figure out how to provide direct emotional support to survivors because a lot of us socialised female and queer are too fucking traumatised, and can be too fucking triggered, to do it ourselves.

my friend says people can't be forced to work on this shit, and i agree. but i also don't know what the fuck people are waiting for, and i don't have a high tolerance for excuses. i want the people in "radical" communities to want them to be safer so badly that this takes priority over any of the self-serving things we pursue. i want there to be a way to engage with critical self-reflection without it being too risky that it shuts people down. but part of what allows that is when people are coming at this process with zero expectations that it will be easy. why should it be? lastly, i want there to be consequences for people who aren't working on their shit. if people haven't earned their right to be in radical community then they don't belong. and to me, the main requirement is dedication to personal and broad transformation through action.

That first house group met for a couple years. Not only did we talk about how to make sure our house was safer- both from our behavior, and when we had parties/potlucks- but we did manage to get down to some of that insidious stuff. The stuff that's hard to see, and really hard to hear when someone else sees it in you. Having that supportive environment made it possible for me to take some of the first concrete steps towards challenging my own privilege. We had time each week to talk about what we were working on in ourselves, and to tell each other what we thought the others could be doing (way harder to say). Each meeting ended with a description of a scenario one of us had seen and needed help knowing how to respond to it- cat-calling on the street, a messed up comment at a party, seeing a guy put-down his partner. Then the following meeting would start with what each of us would have done in that situation to call it out or deal with it. It was one of the ways that helped to broaden our perspective from our little house bubble out into the real world.

The house dudes group fell apart when we all moved away. But other houses I've lived in have had similar groups – thankfully none of them had led to doing everyone else's dishes.

All the things we don't have to notice, don't ever see or hear about, and certainly never have to think about if we don't want to… those are the things that men's groups need to be working on.

What's Our Motivation?

by Matt

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I've spent a long time thinking about what to do as a person socialized male and committed to supporting feminist goals. I haven't put nearly as much thought into why. I don't so much mean "Why struggle toward collective liberation and an end to patriarchy?" as I do "Why me?" Why do I as an individual identify as a male ally?

So, I'd like to pose the question, as much to myself as the readers of these words: "Why are we doing this? What's our motivation?" *

To be better people? To be caring and responsible intimate partners? To assuage shame and guilt? To more convincingly cover up our past mistakes and redirect attention away from our flaws? To create structures for meaningful accountability? To respond to a request from someone we've hurt? To create or strengthen community? To help build truly sustainable movements for justice? To cultivate the perfect radical image? To fit in? To stand out? To contribute to resistance to violence and dehumanization in every way we know how? To stand in solidarity with women and trans- and queer people? To make people think we're different and safe?

Maybe the motivations in the paragraph above should be a checklist. Mark those that apply to you. If I were to do so, thinking honestly with a clear head about the ways I've engaged with feminism since the age of 18 or so, I'd probably check nearly every box, some with big bold marks made with deep conviction, and others with meek reluctance, perhaps in pencil so I could erase them if I got cold feet before sharing the list with anyone else.

* We: I'm identifying here with the rest of us who benefit from male privilege and have made a commitment to resist patriarchy.

men's groups need a way to figure out how to provide direct emotional support to survivors because a lot of us socialised female and queer are too fucking traumatised, and can be too fucking triggered, to do it ourselves.

this situation, overall, has contributed to my frustration that sometimes people who have been socialised male who seem to want to deconstruct the patriarchal aspects of their selves get so discouraged by how difficult certain steps of this process are that they stop doing the work. this could either be because they pity themselves, they see themselves as victims, or they decide that they are powerless. and it is difficult for me to feel compassion or empathy for the ways that socialised males have twisted their suffering at the hands of patriarchy into a scenario where they are too disempowered to create the circumstances in their (our) lives which would overturn their positions into ones more conducive to (collective) healing, solidarity, and growth.

in the case of this online men's group failing to get off the ground, i have heard almost every member of it that i talk to complain about how it's not going anywhere, as if it's up to chance that difficult conversations are going to flare up without a certain amount of provocation. i mean, the difficult stuff. not the surface answers to "why are we all wanting to be in a men's group?". i mean, "how do we deal with situations that come up where people we like are perpetrating abuse and assault in our communities?", "how can change our culture to begin to see confrontation as constructive?", "where in the depths of ourselves are we recognising a need for a men's group? is there shame there? guilt? is there fear? what else?", "are we afraid of accountability processes?", etc.

is, and how upset he is with himself, and how difficult all of this has been for him, and all the things that he wants which would make him feel better, and this is an example of self-victimisation. and helplessness. and i want him to stop putting off facing the things within him that allowed him to rape so that we don't lose yet another aspiring radical to the jaws of unaccountable-escape-land.

* at another point, i was told by a friend that he felt that he could really use a men's group to begin understanding how to move forward after realising that he had sexually assaulted someone he did not want to hurt. he had had the experience of talking with some other men about it right after it happened, but did not feel that the formation of a men's group would happen in the place that he was in. because i wanted him to have access to men as resources, and because i knew that he was not the only friend of ours lacking a space for processing things with other men, i strongly encouraged another friend who had been trying to organize one in the city we live in to entertain the idea of an online men's group, which it turns out had already been on his mind. he initiated its formation after we spoke, and i got people in touch who i was very excited about getting the chance to know each other, as most of them i would describe as being some of the most supportive, inspiring male allies i have known. mostly, i was excited that my friend who had been lacking an avenue for processing the assault that he perpetrated would have access to these people and begin coming out about what he needed to work on. as things came together, i expected the perpetrator to take advantage of the opportunity to come out openly and discuss what aspects of his gender socialisation, for example, had contributed to this abuse. especially since he had been seeking this opportunity, specifically. but time passed and i heard over and over again from the members i knew intimately of how the group "never talked about anything". still i waited to hear that the perpetrator would come out, and after months of waiting and hearing that this was not happening, i decided to finally tell a few of my nearest and dearest in the group about the assault and about my wishes that some dialogue about the assault would get initiated via the listserv. one person made an attempt to contact him off-list, without specifically mentioning the assault be asking that a conversation could happen, to which he never responded. another member of the group has been in contact with him on and off since the assault happened, but has not had much success with finding the perpetrator willing and self-motivated to be working on his shit. so the men's group exists and i hear more about how almost nothing personal gets discussed over it, despite there being some of the most dedicated anti-sexist, feminist, male-socialised people i know who are all a part of it.

How about you? Which would you check? Answer honestly.

To me, it's one of many of the things that feels complicated about being a male ally. It's one of those uncomfortable and disturbing ironies: identifying as a male feminist, while certainly making possible some degree of derision and ostracization if one is particularly outspoken amongst other men, often accrues plenty of benefits as well. In fact, I bet most of us who identify as men and have publicly staked an allegiance to feminism have heard this one: "He's just doing it to get laid." I know I've heard it – and dismissed it out of hand.

But, in the past I've often treated that crude and uniformed accusation with some equally unnuanced thinking and arrived quickly at the comfortable conclusion that I have nothing to worry about. After all, I don't believe myself capable of such a perverse inversion of feminist ideas. But thinking a little more intentionally, under the surface is the suggestion that our motivations aren't always as pure as we might wish—that male and feminist, when spoken together, should always be regarded with some healthy skepticism—and that there are benefits we enjoy that we might not always pay close attention to.

Ultimately, I think the idea is this: what we might call male privilege is a sticky and enduring thing—that's what makes it difficult to deconstruct and work through. It's not easily set aside; one doesn't simply check it at the door by grabbing onto the label "feminist" or "male ally." Instead, it seems that those privileges stay with us through the threshold of feminist consciousness and beyond, albeit sometimes in a somewhat distorted form. Even among feminists of all genders, patriarchy still functions to the detriment of women and trans- and queer people and to the benefit of men. One example: as in other realms, there are a plethora of disgusting pejoratives that are used to attack and discredit women feminists; one reserved for male feminists doesn't immediately come to mind.

I received a letter a year or so ago from someone with whom I'd had a relationship during college. We hadn't spoken in nearly two years and she wrote me to explain some of the ways in which I had hurt her during our relationship. Among the things she said was that she had learned from me to mistrust men who claim to be feminists in order to engage privately in the types of behaviors they condemn publicly. I wrote back, saying in part that I recognized as true everything she had said to me.

In reflecting upon my behavior since, I've realized that the dynamic at play was a little more complicated than simply using feminism as leverage in my relationships with women. What was going on, as I understand it now, was less of a conscious exploitation of feminism. I still feel certain that there were plenty of genuine motivations for my engagement with feminism. But, not incidentally, I invested massively more effort in being a feminist in my public life than in my private one. I worked hard to cultivate an image of a committed male feminist and put myself on the frontlines of several feminist projects. I was quick to judge other men for any perceived failings of feminist consciousness. Meanwhile, I was lazy with regard to my thinking and my behavior when it came to the private and interpersonal. I know that my public feminist activities suggested that people could expect a certain level of care and intentionality in my intimate relationships. That turned out, for several of my partners, not to be the case.

I didn't become a feminist in order to hurt other people; I became a feminist because I believed in gender justice and collective liberation. But, I put the work in where I stood to benefit and got sloppy when it came to the tricky, interpersonal stuff that most people were never going to see anyway. As a result, I sacrificed my relationships with a number of women with whom I was close because I failed to treat them with the level of care commensurate with the vulnerabilities that come with intimacy.

own feelings, in a society where other men are all suffering from the same deprivation. with no mention of his power, as someone who had had access to radical community all along, to have changed his circumstances. to work on his shit. instead, he became extremely depressed after being called out and, in my experience, funneled too much of the attention of the conversations away from what he had done, to how damaged he was. he also cited societal taboos around STIs as playing a role in his choice to abuse during those four years. and while i agree that numerous challenges present themselves to any of us trying to achieve intimacy and navigate taboos about sexuality and sexual health in this society and culture, i do not see him as a victim.

* another time, i learned that a friend of mine had raped another friend. when i first learned of this, the situation was seeming to lend itself to a "transformative" model of justice more than most other situations of assault that ive seen in my community: for one, he was able to understand (to some extent), from the survivor talking to him about it right after it happened, that his actions had constituted rape and had deeply hurt the survivor. and although he recognised that he had not had an understanding of what he had been doing at the time, he did not deny it and was engaging with people he was close with about what he had done, openly and honestly. he realised that his understanding of consent was absolute shit, and seemed interested in gaining more knowledge and skills to become a safer person. the fairly informal process of accountability followed accordingly, with some specific requests from the survivor about disclosure to individuals in their shared community and seeing a therapist. i had a lot of hope that he would follow through with these things without some formal accountability process, and when we would check in about it, he would give me the impression that things were going well and that he was following through. but in time it became clear that he was not following through with any part of it to the satisfaction of the survivor. the short stint of seeing a therapist ended and he began complaining about how it would be hard to find another one, while making no effort to make that happen that i was able to see. the few people that she had requested he talk to about what he had done had not received the full disclosure she had asked for, and whatever part they had received was not done in anywhere close to a timely manner. because i felt betrayed by the ways that i felt he had been misrepresenting himself to me, i gradually began distancing myself from him and finding other people to function as a go-between, so that the survivor's needs could still be advocated for. i have learned that in the time that has passed since then, that the perpetrator has become self-absorbed and pre-occupied with the ways that he has felt abandoned by people like myself. this failure to recognise the ways that his lack of accountability could be triggering to people who were originally willing to be involved but who are also survivors (like myself) is an example of a man beginning a process of radical transformation but getting stuck on their own suffering, without a full analysis of the way that oppression works (and their position in that food chain). he has spent a lot of time since the rape talking about and focusing on how depressed he

varied fabric of intimate connections, and that the language to express this deprivation among them is similarly evasive, along with whatever routes to a solution might exist, i have compassion because of my understanding that they have inherited this legacy through the same patriarchal indoctrination that suuuuuucks for all of us. i see the ways that these precursors to total disassociation from themselves and others bars their capacity for empathy, and for this reason i am particularly interested in observing drastic change, for this i know is a part of setting the stage for domestic and sexual violence. as cis-men begin understanding the sources of the aspects of themselves that have been trained to uphold patriarchal norms, they often begin imagining what they would look like if they were to be liberated from this socialisation, and this image usually includes a world that is both more loving and embracing of their whole selves, and that is far, far safer and more enjoyable for the rest of us.

yet among all of the beautiful transformations and realisations that i have witnessed and that have been shared with me, there is a phenomenon that i can not stomach under any circumstance. this is when the beginnings of cis-men's processes of discovery begin moving towards functioning as an excuse for self-pity, self-victimisation, and powerlessness. i have seen this in situations both dangerous and insulting, but never harmless. and i think that a tolerance of this way of viewing oneself is one of many places where much of the plague of gendered violence within radical communities comes from.

Trigger Warning! – descriptions of sexual violence to follow

* i was friends with someone who turned out to be a perpetrator who was lying to his sexual partners about having an untreatable STI. he called me after being outed publicly, on the internet, because he knew that i would be personally affected by the news, as someone he had worked to gain the trust of as an ally through processing the ways patriarchal violence have infiltrated our shared community. he told me, when i asked "why" he had withheld this necessary disclosure all those four years, that he "did it" because he has a hard time achieving true intimacy with people outside of sexual relationships, and that even though that other connection was what he wanted, he accepted casual sex as a replacement for it. therefore, he would keep information from people he wanted to sleep with (on tour. how punk.) so as to gain access, fearing that their knowledge of his status would cause them to not consent. i know, from knowing him, that this understanding of himself follows from a perverted feminist analysis of his own male socialisation. from the belief that he has been robbed of the opportunity to connect with people deeply as someone who was shamed from being in touch with his

Creating the image of being a responsible male ally and being committed to feminism in all aspects of life are two very different things. I, and many of the feminism-identified men I know, have let the former cover for the latter.

I share this example from my own life, not because I want to focus necessarily on the particular dynamic of men claiming feminism in public and being poor intimate partners in private. While I think this is a common and serious problem, I want to use my experience to illustrate a broader point. Even with the good intentions that I believed I had, I still failed to create consistency in my commitment to feminism and in doing so allowed the status that I achieved as a publicly visible male feminism to fill in for an actual sustained commitment to tracking down patriarchy wherever it lay within me. In this failing, I hurt other people and betrayed my own beliefs. Creating the image of being a responsible male ally and being committed to feminism in all aspects of life are two very different things. I, and many of the feminism-identified men I know, have let the former cover for the latter.

I've seen these dynamics play out in all kinds of ways. I know guys that will make loud public denouncements of someone called out for sexual violence and never offer support to the survivors or try to hold the perpetrator accountable. I see men wear feminism as a badge with women when they first meet, while abandoning those same ideals with their friends and colleagues in political work. I know plenty of men who race to be the first to yell the nauseatingly oft-repeated phrase "that's so fucked up" in response to a story about some sexist incident, but seem little invested in finding out how they themselves are fucked up. I'm sure we can all think of an example or two or many to add here.

We need relationships of solidarity and mutual accountability, not props for being the "good guys".

The point is, in every case, there's a tension between the identity these men want to claim and their actions. Their commitment to feminism is inconsistent. Are they using feminism for the express purpose of covering up other shit and getting away with it? I happen to believe that in most cases the answer is no. Instead, I think that these guys have just taken their commitment to feminism far enough to know the lingo, quote a couple of theorists, temper the worse of their masculine impulses, and receive the occasional pat on the back for being "good dudes." They haven't traced things all the way down—just to the point where the external incentives end and the hard work begins.

This is where I think men can help one another and where men's groups can play a crucial role. We need to provide one another with a critical kind of support. We need to point out to one another the inconsistencies and contradictions, to help each other see clearly the places where we fall flat on our promises to ourselves and others, and to encourage one another to really take a close look and work hard at changing. I think that "men's groups" is just a clumsy shorthand for any of the myriad ways that we can do this. I don't think there's any one formula or model that will work for every person, group, community, or situation. There are plenty of ideas and suggestions offered by the other authors whose writing is included here. But, I do believe this is work for which men must take responsibility, and that we need one another's support to do that. Let's make the "why" part of the conversation and be vigilant about the rewards that come along with doing this work. We need relationships of solidarity and mutual accountability, not props for being the "good guys". Our interpersonal and private commitment to feminism should mirror our public stance.

To conclude I want to come back to the "what". Ultimately, I think there may be little we can do to be sure that we aren't ben-

anti-racist or anti-colonial or any other work to be perfectly un-marred by our experiences in life thus far, and therefore allow for the inevitability of fuck-ups to occur along our ways -- but i believe strongly in the tactic of using social pressure to stress that there is some urgency to transform the things within each other that mirror oppression, so that these can become communities that really can be safer. and not just scenes.

i do a lot of talking and listening with male-assigned, male-identified people[†] in a particular area of my life (among many), which is largely made up of predominantly anarcha-feminist influenced, predominantly white, queer-positive, transient-ish "punks"[‡], about the ways that we are each affected by, or even aware of, gender-based and sexual violence. i encourage these sorts of conversations among my friends informally and continuously. i also organise spaces and gatherings to facilitate discussions within this demographic about ways that we (as predominantly settlers) have been acculturated to re-create and tolerate dynamics of colonialism and racism, where intersections between these various axes of oppression are sometimes discussed in groups exclusive to gender socialisation. in these environments, it becomes more comfortable for people socialised male[§] to be connecting with one another deeply about the tension between having power and privilege which is oppressing others, and simultaneously recognising their need for healing (and the relationship between the two).

through my involvement as an organiser and facilitator of these shared spaces and experiences, many people who have been socialised male talk to me about their process of coming to understand how patriarchy has deprived them of a certain sort of nourishment throughout their lives. when i listen to cis-men, in particular, talk about the ways that they have trouble accessing a complex emotional landscape, or achieving a rich and

† the language around these ideas is still awkward and untidy, because gender classification can be a pretty untidy business. "male-assigned" is a reference to what sex a person was determined to be at birth, presumably based on what their body parts remind the doctor of. if they later go on to identify with a male gender, then they might be referred to as a "cis-male", "cis-man", what have you. these people do not experience a disparity between the gender they have been assigned and socialised as and their experience of themselves, as transgendered and transsexual and genderqueer people do.

‡ my apologies -- there is a fine line between being transparent about the source of one's basis for understanding, and sounding like a totally pretentious idiot who's making a million boxes and checkin 'em, so pardon me if i crossed it there but the picture, i feel, should be painted…

§ by referring to a group of people as "socialised male", i am including anyone who identifies as having had aspects of their upbringing impose expectations of masculinity onto them. these people may or may not identify as "male". this is a broad category that can include trans-men and trans-women and cis-men (and maybe even cis-women, depending!) and gender-queers, and can be a useful way of dividing into groups to discuss our relationship to certain ideas, as many of their origins may date back to our gender socialisation. also notable is that some people will not identify as having been socialised male or female, and for this we have had discussions among people identifying as having had a queer socialisation.

With or Without You

The Tactic of Pressure to Prioritise Consent and Build a More Radical Counter Culture

by vanessa vendetta

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it takes a relentless amount of effort to keep up the standard that being a part of "radical"-ly identifying community requires critical self-reflection and a dramatic departure from the ways we've learned to treat each other outside of these intentional spaces. i did not decide that aspiring toward this standard myself, and demanding it from the people I share space with, was how i was going to live or relate to people. but i have come to know this vehement part of myself and my expectations from analysing what has become a survival instinct in my process of recovering from various ways that i have been betrayed from within the false protection of what i have hoped was a "counter"-culture*. i live this way because my approach to survival, which has by necessity always been hyper-vigilant, has become even more so since learning throughout more than a decade and a half of involvement in d.i.y. scenes that many of us are premature to proclaim affinity with ideals we are not yet ready to enact. however, rather than this realisation making me write off radical, d.i.y. culture in general, and losing faith in the people who embrace it (i won't! i can't!), these experiences have made me dedicated to actualising transformation in myself and in many others within the culture that i depend on who are similarly, or not-so-similarly damaged.

because i realise that the process of getting to a better place is epic and ongoing, i do not expect myself or anyone else identifying as a feminist or as someone working to do

* "not 'sub-culture'". to me, this has always come along with the expectation that people wanted to wipe the slate clean. that we wanted no part of dominant society, in particular its sexist, racist, classist, misogynistic, homophobic, ableist, capitalist, colonialist bullshit... it can't just be about what we do to have fun together (let alone how we dress). doing anti-oppression work is my contribution to taking down western civilized culture. they are inextricably linked.

efitting from our identification with feminist struggle. Like I said earlier, we can't simply wash away our privileges. Being vigilant is important and so is always being willing to listen and respond meaningfully when concerns are raised about our identification with feminism or our behavior. But, maybe in the end, the best way to be careful about the why is to hold our own feet to the fire on the what. As I mentioned earlier, I think that when managed carefully a facile identification with feminism can result in reaping plenty of the benefits without subjecting oneself to many of the risks. But, if one is fully engaged, working both publicly and privately for gender justice, the risks and rewards may balance themselves more equitably and erase the incentives to commit halfway to feminism.

What things might we commit to achieving together?

Are we working alone and with others to pick apart the ways that patriarchy has insinuated itself into our lives and beings over years of deep immersion in a sick society? Are we drawing attention to the mistakes and struggles—large and small, public and private—that most of us might more comfortably keep hidden from the world? Are we making ourselves vulnerable to other men in ways that many of us find uncomfortable, unsettling, unfamiliar? Are we pushing one another to be better, to recognize our mistakes and provide support in accounting for them? Are we talking with other men who haven't thought much about their own privilege before, pointing out things to work on and inappropriate behavior? Are we willing to talk with others about parts of our private and intimate lives that we aren't proud of, mistakes made and promises broken? When we write or talk publicly about our engagement with feminism do we address our own experiences and struggles, or restrict our public discourse to the impersonal and prescriptive? Do we accept that none of us will ever rid ourselves completely of persistent and ongoing patriarchal conditioning and that we must all start somewhere?

Let's remember the feminist formulation that the personal is political. Taking political action in solidarity with the people most directly affected by patriarchy is important. But, so is being a good friend, a good partner, a good ally. Let's strive to be consistent in our commitment to stamping out patriarchy in our lives wherever we find it.

How can we stay accountable?



Here's another memory:

Someone: "I'm a guy, and I know that that means I have male privi, and all that, but how do I not be a patriarch!?"

Someone else: "Like okay, that's good that you're asking that, and maybe we could come up with a list of patriarchal behaviors and you could check them off and work on not doing them, but eventually, yer gonna fuck up in someone's eyes and maybe just becoming 'not a patriarch' is not enough. Being "not a patriarch" is just a neutral position. Maybe the point is to shift your perspective to be AS invested in smashing patriarchy as women are."

So that's thesis #2: if yer gonna do anti-pat work, don't expect it to stay in the realm of thoughts and feelings, be ready to take it into physical support and action.

Fear: So, sometimes I wonder if men's groups are just there to socialize straight men so they can become more appropriate "mates"? I don't wanna believe it, but I think the powerful combination of mutated nature in the form of hormones, brain chemistry reactions, our genes desire to reproduce, other gross biological reductions of behavior, state sponsored-market driven nurturing, romcoms, football, and other subconscious sexist demons are pushing us all towards hetero-nuclear families. From this lens, the elephants are only working on being "anti-pat" because it helps their offspring's survival, they don't give a shit about the totality, and that's depressing cause elephants destroy electric fences by throwing rocks, and... Can you see why I hate Attenborough yet?

didn't destroy the men's group! Did men not talk as honestly with the judging eye of women in the room? Maybe, but I don't think the meeting room was the site for the real gut-wrenching stuff. I think the men's anti-pat group really just introduced and helped us be more comfortable talking to each other one-on-one about privileged behavior, our feeling, fuck-ups and homo-social/sexual desires. And yeah, fuck it, I think all the arguments to having a "men's only" space are boring. It's not NECESSARY to have a closed group based on identity to cultivate an opposition to patriarchal culture.

Thesis #1; don't call them "men's groups;" call them anti-pat groups, and leave the identity of who attends open. If you need to state what you are doing {IE; working on unlearning patriarchal behaviors} do that.

Ok, so to continue with the story of my experience with Denver and onto my second thesis thingy, it was years later and another incarnation of a men's anti-pat group sprung up. DUDEBRO (Dudes Unlearning Diabolical Education, Be Radical Okay!) had a cooler name and a better sense of humor about themselves. They published a quarterly-of-the-moon-cycle zine, and attracted men from more different walks of life than the previous men's anti-pat groups had. I can't actually say as much about it from an insider's perspective, because I was far from even slightly IDing as a man, and I was far more focused on creating community with other queer and transpeople.

But how DUDEBRO ended is my cautionary tale. There had been a sexual assault in town, and some people who had been talking with the survivor wanted DUDEBRO to do something about it, meaning specifically getting the fucked up elephant to attend their meetings. DUDEBRO was like, "uuuh, no?" People felt like they couldn't handle being in a room with an actual rapist and doubted whether they could have any kind of positive effect on him anyway, cause he had made it pretty clear that he wasn't going to be accountable already. (ps. I don't remember everything, and I might be getting things wrong – it was a while ago.)

So yeah, that was the last thing I ever heard from that anti-pat group. They dissolved sometime afterwards, and I think (maybe other people have better insight then me) maybe because of it. I don't hate the dudes who were a part of that group; they were and still are some of the most trustworthy men I've ever worked with around issues of sexism and I think in part because they worked on their own issues for so long. I also can't really hate someone for setting their own boundaries of what stuff they weren't ready for. I think, it was just a lil' disappointing. I like to tell DudeBro's story because I think if going into the group, they had considered doing that kind of thing (meeting with people they didn't like, confronting rape), it wouldn't have been so scary when they were finally asked to.

Sigh, who knows.

I Hate David Attenborough

by Geyl Fling Force Wynd

I wanna talk about men's groups. What they can do and what I don't think they should do. My experience with them is a lil' outdated and limited, as I've spent my adult life as a woman, but there was a short overlap in my teens/early 20s where I really got some good things out of attending an "anti-pat" or men's anti-patriarchy group.



Ok, so I hate David Attenborough. I mean, I like those animal shows but his (or similar copycats) commentary makes them unwatchable. I'm mostly mad at how his voice, like G-D or big brother, tells us what and why animals do things. "...watch as the male preforms a mating dance to impress the female..." How does he fucking know!? It's not like he asked the animal. He never cites the studies, rarely explains other theories for animal behavior, hella doesn't even mention "homosexual, intersex and transgender" animals (read Biological Exuberance) and more often than not explains away everything as about mating. I think it's bad science, but everyone is SOOO ready to accept the authority of a disembodied British voice.

Anyway, so I wanted to tell a much repeated story about elephants, and like David Attenborough I'm not going to cite the source. That's irresponsible and hypocritical, but really, the details don't matter, read:

– Elephants are matriarchal. That's gleaned from the fact that there's an alpha female of the herd who leads a group of elephants to like, good water spots and away from danger. Young male elephants live with the herd until they become adolescents, and then the alpha female kicks them out of the herd if they don't stop acting sexually aggressive to the female elephants. The "bad boy" elephants have to go get trained how to be good pachydudes by some older bull elephants for some years, and then they can come back to the herd.

Cool story bro, right? Elephants have got a system, and maybe its essential the same as a feminist/anti-pat men's group. It's nice to think this kinda thing happens naturally all over the world. I definitely think that there are elements of it that remind me of good men's groups.

- being accountable to a group of women

- teaching young dudes/dudes that have fucked up, how to behave

In some ways this is all I want a men's group to do, and if yer men's group is doing this, I don't know if anything else needs to be said, but here I am saying more...

Unfortunately the story about elephants, like the story of men's groups, is lost in the hetero, non-trans, mating paradigm of Attenborough. Regardless of how the "mentoring" process is different for homosexual or transgender elephants (and there ARE both, I just don't remember the details), humans have a wide range of sexuality and gender expressions and thus have an equally wide range of gendered privileges and experiences with violence, sexuality, safety, blah blah etc. What this boils down to: there are folks who would benefit from a men's groups who aren't men, and there are men that could benefit, if men's groups weren't also a place that "doesn't get" how their intersecting IDs affect their relationship to patriarchy (transmen, POC, fags etc.).

I don't trust myself to "tell it like it is" about other people's experiences, so yeah, don't take my word for it, go read/talk to other people. My point is that centering the identities man, male, men, puts other people in a weird bind. It's the same kind of bind that happens in "women's spaces." That's why some feminist spaces have responded with the spread of "women and trans" replacing "women's only". I'm not proposing that "men's only" be replaced with "men and trans." I mean, whatever, do what you want, I'd be interested in hearing how that turns out, but I've also had personal experience with seeing how "women and trans" failed its goal of trans inclusion/liberation.

I have a suggestion for a solution, but it's later on.

There's lots of "male bonds with male" rituals in american mainstream culture, and they're stupid (to me), and usually are the site that forms essential patriarchal hierarchies. I'm not too interested in a "feminist alpha-male" archetype. I don't know if this is how elephants work, like, do the older bulls brow-beat the younger ones into appropriate masculinity? That doesn't sound like it would work to me. I think it would create new layers of suppressed rage, and I think elephants are smarter than that.

I think there is a problem with men hanging out in an exclusive, explicitly men's only space. How am I supposed to trust a group of guys to be "talking through their shit" and not just patting themselves on the back or developing sociopathic methods of placating angry women? I can't, unless people outside of that meeting can find out what is talked about in it, or see some sort of tangible results.

Ok, new series of stories, it might get personal...

In Denver, where I grew up, my old anarchist crew was in part, formed out of attending a mixed gender feminist (riot grrrl?) club called SABOTAGE (Sisters And Brothers Organized Towards Achieving Gender Equality). Yes, it was a really good acronym, and maybe that was the best thing it had going for it. We were mostly all in high school or freshly out of it, and our stated goal was to make the Denver punk scene not sexist. I don't have a clear analysis as to why it dissolved; I think it had a lot to do with men and boys taking up too much space in the meetings. So basically the same group of people formed two groups, a women's collective and a men's anti-pat group. The structure was that the topics of conversation at the men's group was created by the women's collective (who did a lot more really, making zines, planning events, etc).

This was right when I was coming out as transgender, I felt alone, blah blah rejected by my family, and this anarcha-punk-feminist crew was my new family. In retrospect, it was kinda gross and damaging that my gender became such a spectacle in the new era of binary gendered feminist organizing. The solution to my fluctuating gender was to allow me "dual-citizenship" to these groups working in tandem.

And that brings me to the part I was trying to get at, where folks from the men's group expressed that they were uncomfortable with women attending. Ladies in the women's group had been like, "we want to attend, just to see what people are saying". Some amount of the men's group wanted to say no, based on the idea that they wouldn't be comfortable talking about all the like, fucked up thoughts, or patriarchal behaviors, with women around. (I don't actually remember that many like, super deep dark conversations.)

So duh, it offended me. "Hello, I'm a lady-creature, I attend this thing, you don't seem uncomfy around me. What's with that?" Blah blah, there was argument, but in the end, other ladies from the women's collective started to attend as well and guess what, it